



Important Terms

Arabic is the universal language of Islam even though Muslims speak many different languages. Islamic terms, therefore, are generally Arabic or Arabic derived.

Allah	The Arabic name for God used by all Muslims and by Arabic speaking Christians
Muhammad	(570-632 A. D.) the Prophet of God who received the revelations of God contained in the Qur'an
Islam	submission to the will of God; used in reference to the "nation" of believers and their faith
Muslim	A person who submits to the will of God; an adherent of Islam (also, sometimes, Moslem)
umma	the Muslim community
Qur'an	(Koran) the book of "recitations" of the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad; the holy book of Islam
sura	a chapter or division of the Qur'an; there are 114
shahada	the profession of faith: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Messenger"
hadith	sayings of the Prophet; traditional stories which aid in governing Islamic life and in interpreting the Qur'an
sunnah	the "beaten path" or body of traditions recounting the deeds, sayings and silent approval of the Prophet covering the details of community life
shari'a	the whole body of rules governing the life of a Muslim; legal doctrine derived from the Qur'an and the sunnah
Sunni	(Sunnite) a follower of the tradition, "orthodox;" the branch of Islam whose adherents believed that Muhammad's successor should be elected; now comprises about 85% of all Muslims
Shi'a	(Shi'ite) "partisans of Ali;" the branch of Islam whose adherents hold that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was Muhammad's successor; now found principally in Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan

ulama	men learned in the law and religious studies; the class responsible for determining Muslim orthodoxy
imam	leader of worship or leader of the Muslim community
mu'azzin	(muezzin) the person who calls the faithful to prayers
mullah	a religious teacher and preacher
ayatollah	literally "reflection of God," used especially in Iran to refer to Shi'a religious leaders, elevated to this status by community consensus
masjid	mosque; any place where worship is performed in groups
jami'	a major mosque where official Friday services are held
	the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, always in the last month of the Muslim calendar; required, if possible, for every Muslim once in lifetime
jihād	struggle, a term sometimes used generally, but also specifically, to designate either a war waged in accordance with the Shari'a in defense of the faith or the personal struggle to overcome one's imperfections and baser impulses in order to become a better Muslim
zakaṭ	a tithe or tax; almsgiving for the poor
Ka'ba	the Ka'ba is the structure in the central courtyard of the Grand Mosque in Mecca which encases the "black stone"; recognized as a shrine, it is the point toward which Muslims pray and the focal point of the hajj
ijtihād	the attempt, when faced by a new situation, to establish a ruling through creative scholarly effort based on the recognized fundamental principles of Islam
	consensus; an agreed upon opinion of the Muslim community
hijra	(hegira) emigration, or the original exodus of the Prophet, and his followers, from Mecca to Medina; the year it occurred, 622, was fixed as the beginning of the Muslim calendar; A.H. denotes years in the Muslim calendar
	one who practices Sufism, a general term alluding to the various schools or orders within both Sunni and Shi'a Islam which espouse mystical approaches to the understanding of God
ṭarīqa	a particular Sufi order or "brotherhood"